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ABSTRACT

The Walkabout program is an optional senior-year educational experience in which New York high school students can acquire the basic skills and confidence to take charge of their lives and contribute to the world. The year-long program is divided into 5 "challenge environments": wilderness (5 weeks): applied academics (18 weeks of health and personal awareness, language arts, social studies, and environmental science): career internship (9 weeks): community service (3 weeks): and final presentation (1 week). These provide students with the opportunity to learn basic and relevant skills, go beyond their self-perceived limitations, recognize their option to change how they deal with others, make meaningful accomplishments, begin to clarify career options, and earn credit toward a high school diploma. Grading is based on an "honors," "credit," or "no-credit" system. The state-approved program is most applicable for average to bright students, either male or female. Interested high school juniors apply and participants are selected for the program from among the applicants. The Walkabout staff serve not only as teachers but also as friends and advisors to the students. Parent, student, and staff reactions to the program are positive. (SB)

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WALKABOUT!

an educational experience

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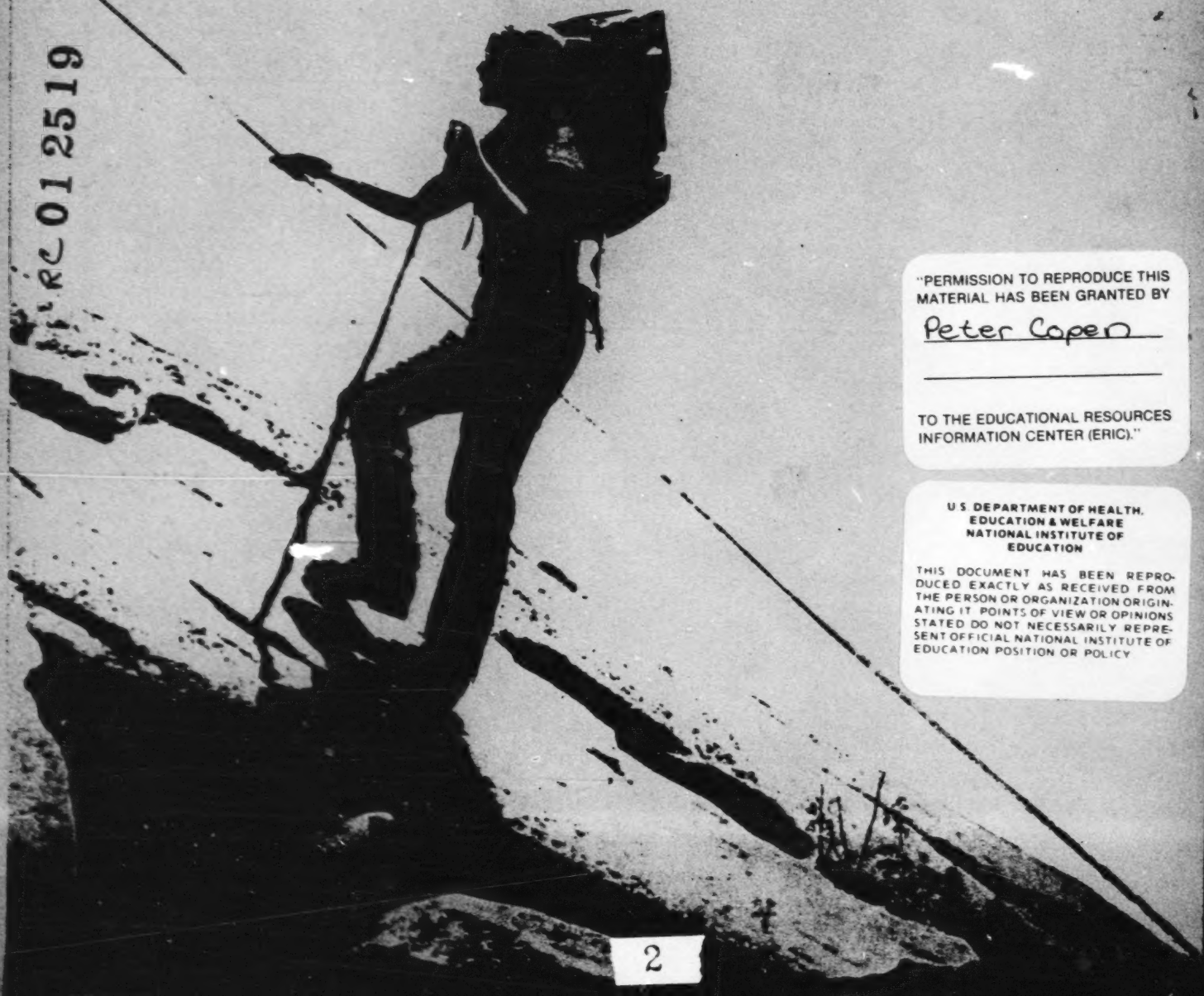

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To the Reader:

Our program is experimental - growing, changing, risking, accepting, and rejecting - with the goal of becoming the best model of its kind. The intention is that others will adapt what we discover to help improve the quality of our childrens' lives and ultimately the quality of life on this planet.

The attached description articulates our current program and its philosophy. It is the result of our experience and observation and is not meant to be the definite statement on experiential education. It is meant to encourage more creative thinking in this field. Most likely we will grow and change by the next publication as we find ways to improve the experience.

Your thoughts on this brochure would be welcomed and appreciated.

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January 1980

DERIVATION OF THE WORD "WALKABOUT"

In Australia, certain aborigine cultures have their adolescents survive alone in the wilderness for six months as a rite of passage before they are accepted into the tribe as adults. This experience is called a Walkabout, the intent of which is to have the adolescents experience their competence as adults.

Our program seeks to provide an adaptation of the Walkabout experience - an adaptation that is relevant to our culture.

The initial ideas on adopting the Australian Walkabout experience to our culture came from an article by Maurice Gibbons written in Phi Delta Kappan - an article that was inspired by the movie "Walkabout."

WHY THE WALKABOUT PROGRAM WAS DEVELOPED

The Walkabout program was developed 1) to discover, develop and refine the learning environments that work for students' lives - ones that focus on the education of the whole person, and facilitate the "transition to adulthood"; 2) to offer that experience to interested students; 3) to help solve the "senioritis" problem. Clearly there is a large degree of boredom, dissatisfaction and lack of motivation felt by many seniors who consider the traditional senior year neither relevant to nor supportive of their needs.

INTENT OF THE PROGRAM

Our immediate goal is to continue to refine this model and demonstrate its effectiveness to interested schools (public and private) and other BOCES, and then assist and support the replication of it. Our long range goals are 1) to "institutionalize" the Walkabout process into the regular high school curriculum and 2) to look at adapting this model for other student populations (i.e., dropout, handicapped, gifted, minority, etc.).

GOAL FOR THE STUDENTS

Our primary goal is for students to acquire the confidence and basic skills to take charge of their lives and make a meaningful contribution to the world. This goal appears to be the essence of being a successful adult in our culture. (See Figure 1).

ACTIVITIES

The goal is achieved by having students learn and experience themselves within five (5) carefully designed activities called challenge environments (See Figure 1): Wilderness, Applied Studies, Community Service, Career Internship, plus a Final Presentation. The following amount of time is allocated for each component: (See Figure 2).

1.	Wilderness (3 weeks of orientation and training. 2 one-week trips)	5 weeks
2.	Applied Academics (2 nine week units)	18 weeks
3.	Career Internship	9 weeks
4.	Community Service	3 weeks
5.	Presentation	1 week
		36 actual weeks of school

OBJECTIVES

The challenge environments provide the opportunity for students to: 1) learn basic and relevant skills; 2) go beyond their perceived limitations (mental barriers); 3) to notice the process by which they deal with people and situations and then to recognize their options to change; 4) to make meaningful accomplishments for themselves and others; 5) to begin to clarify their career options; and 6) to earn credit towards their high school diploma.

1. **WILDERNESS**

This environment gives students the chance to experience what needs to happen for their lives to work and for a society to work as well. A micro-society is created where a wonderful clarity emerges about how they handle their perceived limitations, how they handle responsibility and how they function in a group.

The beauty of the Wilderness as a learning environment is that it can be used as a metaphor and referred to in all the subsequent environments. The mountains become more than mountains. They become symbols of challenge and accomplishment.

2. **APPLIED ACADEMICS**

In the Applied Academics we try to show students that it is just another challenge area in their lives - just another "mountain" to climb. The students are encouraged to learn and apply relevant skills and information and to notice the process of how they deal with people and situations in a classroom environment. Some of the skills that students learn in this process are time management, doing quality work and dealing with boredom.

There are two discrete components separated by the internship. This allows students to reenter this environment in the Spring with a new perspective.

(A) Health-Personal Awareness

The goal is to provide students with an awareness of their personal and interpersonal behavior patterns and then have them learn the skills to change behavior if they choose.

The skills learned in this course (i.e., communication, active listening, assertiveness, problem solving) are most

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directly related to improving self-confidence and are used in every area of the students' lives. It is for this reason that this course appears to be the most important "in class" course in the Walkabout.

(B) Language Arts

The intent of the Language Arts curriculum is to allow students (a) to learn the basic skills of clear and effective communication, both written and verbal; (b) to learn effective reading skills; (c) to learn skills of decision making particularly around issues that create moral dilemmas; (d) to experience the joy of clear self-expression - both to others and from others.

(C) Environmental Science

The intent of this curriculum is to 1) expand the students' sense of appreciation and responsibility for earth's much endangered natural environments, and 2) to provide students the opportunity to gain confidence in their ability to make a positive contribution in the realm of environmental affairs.

Environmental principles and exemplary problems are carefully examined, with independent research projects, oral presentations, and the development of student problem-solving skills being emphasized throughout all aspects of the course. Field trips and acclimatization experiences are used to enhance the affective goals of the course.

(D) Social Studies

This curriculum is designed to help students take charge of their lives as they learn practical skills to deal with social issues. The course focuses on five areas - self-education, politics, consumer issues and the persuasive power of language and media and preparation for career internship.

3. **CAREER INTERNSHIP**

The purpose is to have students: 1) gain more clarity about their future career choices by working in a real life situation and taking on adult responsibilities, 2) experience the process of identifying, organizing and arranging their own internships, 3) notice how they handle their goals and interactions with people on the job.

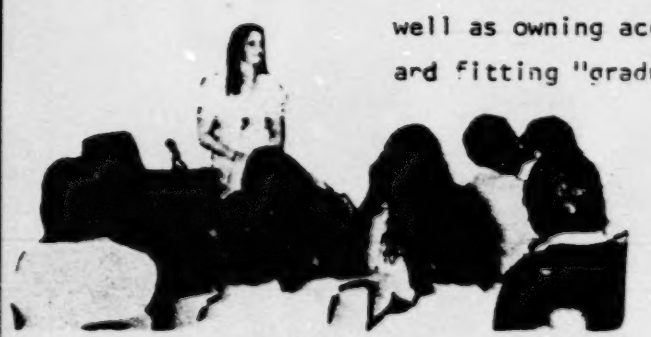
Some examples of internship fields are special education, law enforcement, small business operations, veterinary medicine, law, newspaper reporting, disc jockey and teaching.

4. **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

The purpose is to have students experience the dynamics of making a meaningful contribution to the community, (i.e., building a trail, helping senior citizens, assisting with pre-schoolers, etc.). Challenges arise in identifying the project, making the connections, organizing the group, planning the project, keeping commitments and handling inter-personal conflicts.

5. **FINAL PRESENTATION**

Students give a verbal presentation to their parents, peers and other interested people of their growth and accomplishments during the Walkabout. The intention is for this to serve as a synthesis of the Walkabout and give the students the opportunity to experience the pride and acknowledgment they have earned and deserve- in other words, to integrate their sense of adulthood and capability. The challenges of public speaking, facing parents and friends as well as owning accomplishments make this experience a meaningful and fitting "graduation" and completion for the Walkabout.



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OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT OCCUR THROUGHOUT THE YEAR THAT HELP THE PROGRAM TO WORK

1. Agreements

   Students are expected to sign a contract of agreements at the beginning of the year. These agreements make it clear what the students are responsible for and what the staff is responsible for so that the Walkabout will work. The agreements also function as a valuable tool for developing integrity and personal effectiveness.

2. Journalizing

   In various Walkabout activities, students are required to keep a journal. In the journal they are asked to interpret their experiences by focusing on three questions: What? (a description of events and feelings); So What? (what did the experience mean): and Now What? (what sort of action can they take or direction can they move in).

3. Individualized Learning Contracts

   Students can contract with an instructor to receive credit for independent study.

4. Individualized Attention

   Each Walkabout student has one of the staff members as an advisor to go over any special issues that come up.

5. Group Meetings

   There is a group business meeting every morning where issues of the day are discussed and shared, as well as a "town meeting" for one period, once a week, to deal in depth with any group issues that arise.

6. Personal Validations

Students are frequently asked to share positive statements about themselves as well as positive statements about others. This has been a very successful activity which helps to contradict many negative feelings.

7. Group Initiative Games

Challenging games that simulate problem-solving situations that require group cooperation and personal initiative.

8. Support Groups

Students have the opportunity to discuss and share problems and issues that concern them so they can get clarity and support.

9. Celebration

Time is allocated for fun and for students to share their talents with the group.

GRADING

We use an "honors", "credit" or "no credit" grading system. There are, in addition, student self-evaluations plus staff and mentor evaluations that allow for an in-depth assessment of the student.

What has worked for us is to separate the grading system from between students and staff and make it a "third party" so that staff can be allied with the students to assist them in handling their credit requirements.

STUDENT PROFILE

Although the Walkabout process is applicable to different student profiles, our program is for "average to bright" male and female high school seniors (past grades are not critical) who feel they can learn better in this environment and who are willing to make the commitment to fully participate, to challenge themselves, and to grow.

The New York State Education Department has approved our curriculum to offer five (5) credits: English (1), Social Studies (1), Science (1), Health (½), Physical Education (½), Elective (1). Students earn these credits through participating in all of the Walkabout Challenge Environments.

LENGTH

Walkabout is a full day for the entire school year. It is an option to the senior year in the local high school.

STUDENT SELECTION

Students (Juniors) in participating Putnam/Northern Westchester High Schools apply to the Walkabout by filling out an application in the Spring. The application is reviewed and some students are selected for an interview. After the interviews, a final selection is made by the Walkabout staff.

STAFF ROLES

The staff throughout the program act in many different roles instructor, mentor, facilitator, friend, co-learner, and advisor. A large part of the success of a program of this type depends on the staff, their willingness to assume these various roles, their perception to know when they are needed and their clarity of purpose.

WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR THE STAFF?

Often joyous and satisfying, never boring, always challenging, sometimes frustrating and fatiguing.

FUNDING

The Walkabout program is offered by Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES and is funded by participating school districts. Developmental monies have come from the NYSED Title IV-C and the Rockefeller Family Fund.

WALKABOUT ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND INTENT

FIGURE I

Students Experience: (Activities-Challenge Areas)	Which Provides the Opportunity: (Objectives)	So They Get: (Intent or Purpose)
1. Wilderness (I & II)	- To learn basic and relevant skills.	The confidence and basic skills to take charge of their life and make a meaningful contribution to the world.
2. Applied Studies (I & II) Health-Personal Awareness Language Arts Environmental Studies Social Studies Physical Education	- To go beyond their perceived limitations (mental barriers). - To notice the process by which they deal with people and situations and then to recognize their options to change. - To make meaningful accomplishments for themselves and others. - To begin to clarify their career options. - To earn credit towards their high school diploma.	
3. Community Service		
4. Career Internship		
5. Presentations		

FIGURE 2

WALKABOUT CALENDAR

Week	September	October	November	December
1	Orientation & training	CS	AA#1	AA#1
2	Orientation & training	CS	AA#1	AA#1
3	Wilderness #1	Applied Academics (AA)#1	AA#1	AA#1
4	Community Service (CS)	AA#1	AA#1	Vacation

Week	January	February	March	April
1	Career Internship (CI)	CI	CI	AA#2
2	CI	CI	CI	AA#2
3	CI	Vacation	AA#2	Vacation
4	CI	CI	AA#2	AA#2

Week	May	June
1	AA#2	Training
2	AA#2	Wilderness #II
3	AA#2	Presentations
4	AA#2	

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QUOTATIONS

The intent of including the following student quotations (from evaluations and presentations) is to communicate to you their experience of the Walkabout's different challenge areas:

Health	-"Probably the most important thing I've learned in all my years of schooling."
Language Arts	-"Very relevant. It's made me more aware and has given me the strength to comfortably and accurately state my views and opinions clearly."
Environmental Science	-"I learned a lot about environmental problems that I really want to do something about. I really want to make my opinion known..."
Social Studies	-"By realizing that learning is what you make of it - I can now understand that I'm bettering myself for me and not for my parents or friends. This makes me feel important."
Community Service	-"It's giving a lot and realizing that when you're out there working for it and you're doing something that's really important, you're doing something for others...not just for yourself."
Wilderness	-"I started thinking that if I did two times in the Adirondacks what I did in the Catskills, then think what I must be doing in other areas...I'm doing two and three times what I felt I could have done in September."
Internship	-"I wasn't used to picking myself up after a number of letdowns..the feeling of hearing the advertisement I had just written over the air was incredible. Something I learned through my internship was now that I know the many patterns I have...I can do something about (them)."
Presentations	-"I really feel like a whole person.
	-"Walkabout kind of gave me a path to go on...because I have a good trail to start with, I'm going to make it o.k."